

From Laboratory to Library: The History of Wayne State University's Education Library

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Abstract:

The Education Library at Wayne State University has a long and storied history. From its beginning at the Detroit Normal School to its final merger with the general library, the Education Library has been at the heart of not only Wayne State University, but also in the development of the College of Education. This paper chronicles the history of the library, and the people who created it, from its very beginning to its final place among the volumes of Purdy/Kresge Library.

Introduction

The story of the early Wayne State University Library system is the story of G. Flint Purdy, library director for three decades (1936-1969) at Wayne State University, an amalgamation of various city institutions for higher education. While Purdy was certainly the impetus for a general library on campus, an “education laboratory,” which also served as a small library, had been functioning since the early years of the Detroit Normal School, precursor to the College of Education. Harriet Scott, the second principal of the Detroit Normal School, accumulated a small collection of professional materials for the student teachers. This small assemblage planted the seeds of the future education library, which continued to grow until it became one of the largest collections of educational materials in the nation. It was a collection that clearly merited its own division in the General Library – the only college in the university to do so – until budget constraints forced a divisional merger of all subjects aside from science, law, and medicine, all of which had their own library buildings by 1970.

A Library Begun in a Basement

The history of the education library is not just one of books, curriculum guides, tests, ERIC documents, textbooks, and professional pamphlets gathered from across the nation. It is also the chronicle of the growth of a college. The Detroit Normal School, housed in a rundown building in the economically disadvantaged side of town, would grow into a College of Education that has been at the forefront of educating future teachers. These two histories are intertwined thanks to the determination of members of the Education faculty that formed the nucleus of what was to become the Education Library.

Harriet Scott had already gathered a small set of professional materials during her tenure at the Detroit Normal School, which was founded in 1881 and later renamed the Detroit Teachers College in 1921. When a central university was created in 1930 by the merger of the Detroit Junior College and the Detroit Teachers College, it moved into the main building of the old Central High School: Hence the name Old Main, which would later become the focal point of the newly minted Wayne University in 1934. Scott’s collection of materials moved into the basement of the library. It would be Scott’s method of using literature “to cultivate a child’s slumbering literary sense and image making power” (Hanawalt, p. 134), which would inspire future education faculty members to create a collection, particularly of juvenile materials, that was unrivaled in the nation.

In 1931, when the Detroit Teachers College relocated to Old Main, three faculty members combined forces to start what they would call an “education laboratory.”

Dr. Gertha Williams (Educational Psychology), Mrs. Lois Place (Library Science), and Miss Eloise Ramsey (English Education) all recognized the need for functional classrooms in a library-like setting that would provide budding teachers with the practice materials they needed to teach children to read. All books from their three departments were moved to a basement classroom in Old Main. “The three instructors held their classes in this room and shared responsibility for the care and circulation of the books” (“Functional Library,” p. 158). This “laboratory” served as a combination of workshop, demonstration, and lessons on reading development.

Most of the children’s literature books came from Ramsey’s own



Exterior shot of the Detroit Normal School, 1871.

*Courtesy of University Archives,
Walter P. Reuther
Library, Wayne State University.*

private collection, which illustrated her commitment to provide the best to her students. As the library's own juvenile collection grew, Ramsey became a pioneer in the field of children's literature, both as an instructor and a woman of impeccable standards. She continued as a tireless advocate for children's literature and education resources, collecting materials from across the nation to support a children's literature collection, until she passed away in 1964.

Eloise Ramsey: An educator ahead of her time

Ramsey was not a product of the Normal School education system of the Nineteenth Century, rather earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from Ohio State University in English, she entered one of the few fields open to women in the early Twentieth Century: teaching. She accepted a post at the Detroit Normal School in 1919. Early on in her career she insisted that a children's literature course be taught to students entering the teaching profession, and by the second semester of her employment, she succeeded in introducing such a course. However, merely the offering of a course was not enough in her eyes. "Students [needed to] read as exhaustively as possible from the truly great literature of children and keep records of what they read ... a teacher must lose herself in the activity of learning" ("Michigan State Fair," p. 2). It was her firm belief that what children read was just as important as their ability to read. She stressed in her classes in the "laboratory," by using materials from her own collection, "that discrimination in choosing the material to be read was the key to a sound education" ("Michigan State Fair," p. 2). As her experience grew over the years, Ramsey was promoted from teacher to professor throughout the laboratory's growth to a College of Education until her retirement in 1956.

In 1938, after the "education laboratory" had become a library, it was first placed on the ground floor of Old Main and later moved in 1949 to the fourth floor. During this time Ramsey was advocating her idea of an institute for the use of books for young people. She castigated education programs, with their fixed credit structure for "denying the opportunity for the quality of reflection that goes into the making of a point of view about books and reading, and consequently about life" (Eloise Ramsey, personal communication, February 18, 1938). Scores of teachers from across the nation,

she wrote in her proposal letter, were writing and asking the same question: Where can I get real training with books? The proposal discussed the abstract theory of reading education, but the kernel was to establish a place where teachers could come and actually use the books they would later use in schools, as well as establishing a rapport with the local Detroit Public School system. The center, or "laboratory," as it continued to be known, continued in the University Library on the fourth floor of Old Main until 1953 when the new Education Library moved to its final location, the Wayne University General Library.

When G. Flint Purdy, a new fresh-faced University Librarian was hired in 1933, he understood Ramsey's predicament, and agreed with her about the use of functional classrooms in the library. Although it appeared fanciful to the University administration, the classrooms would appear in the General Library he designed and built in 1951. When he arrived, he described the "education laboratory" as:



Eloise Ramsey, Professor of English Education, poses for a picture at the Wayne University Library, 1953.

Courtesy of University Archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

A tremendously significant and highly successful pedagogical experiment. The 'Laboratory' was a joint project of English Education, Educational Psychology, and Library Science. Physically it consisted of an embryonic but astutely selected collection of children's literature, educational psychology books, and library science tools, housed in and adjacent to a classroom in which the

relevant courses were taught. I believe that Wayne University has been, and is, producing competent elementary school teachers. Much of the result derives from the excellence of staff. Some of it results from the 'laboratory' technique which they have evolved (G. Flint Purdy, personal communication, March 7, 1956).

With Purdy's arrival on the scene, Ramsey had her champion at last. She not only had the support of the University Librarian, but her collection made up the core of one of the largest collections of juvenile literature at an academic institution. She also established the basis for a collection of rare juvenile literature, later named the Ramsey Collection of Literature for Children and Young People after its pioneer. Moreover, she persuaded the University Librarian to give her library funds for new purchases, a process which continues today.

The General Library: Educational Division

In 1949, Purdy actively campaigned for separate buildings for the overcrowded library at Old Main, which by then included far more than just educational materials. In his proposal, he laid out the continuation of the divisional nature of the library which included Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education. The chief aim of the library was one that still resonates today, namely, to make materials accessible to students, faculty, and staff while also offering a space for the conservation of recorded knowledge (G. Flint Purdy, personal communication, July 1949).

For the Education Division, he proposed continued work with the College of Education on library materials, recommending a general curricular reading area, facilities for the storage of audio-visual materials and microfiche/microfilm, seminar rooms, an open-shelf textbook collection and Education and Curriculum Laboratories. The Education Division, in his eyes, was not just a place for students and faculty of Wayne, but also a place where community teachers could visit to remain current on teaching methods.

The Wayne University General Library opened its doors in 1953, with the Education Library located on the fourth floor. Annual reports, from the opening of the Education Library to its merger in 1986, illustrate a growing library that dealt with familiar library issues: space, automation, budgetary challenges, and staff turnover. In 1957, even with those challenges, the Education Library counted for half of the total circulation requests from the General Library. This continued throughout the 1960s, until circulation statistics were combined with the Humanities and Social Sciences Divisions in the 1970s.

The 1950s were a boom time for the Education Library. As it continued to grow, it added and expanded programs such as the Children's Literature Collection, off-campus service, circulating audio-visual materials, and the periodical collection. At that time, it was the policy of the Education Library to purchase at least one copy of every significant English

language publication appearing on standard or commonly-used book lists, with a small percentage of the budget still allocated to children's and young adult literature. In 1953, the collection numbered 66,000 books and pamphlets, 5,000 children's books, a collection of first editions, a historical collection furnished by Ramsey, and a collection of contemporary foreign language children's books in order to serve Detroit's diverse population. In Education Division reports, the librarians noted their plans as they came to fruition, including a Curriculum Materials Center in 1957, which aided local teachers in lesson planning, as well as failed attempts such as the attempt to get publishers' copies of books ("Annual Report Education," 1957).



Students and staff at work in room 400 of Old Main at Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan, 1952.
The room, originally used as a cafeteria for Central High School, served as the Education Library from July of 1949 to August of 1953

Courtesy of University Archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

The 1960s found the Education Library staff focusing on circulation statistics and the outdated circulation system. Although other parts of the library were continuing to boom, Education Division personnel found their book budget inadequate for the number of new education publications arriving each year. It wasn't just the librarians who were concerned. The Education Library Advisory Committee, run by the College of Education, also expressed deep anxiety over the inability of the library to purchase enough

materials for the students in the College of Education. As one librarian wrote in the report, "Our comprehensive acquisition of titles has always been one of our strongest assets" ("Annual Report Education," 1963).

Discussion also included a detailed description of reference service, which provided a bibliographical service to faculty members alerting them to new publications in their areas of research. By providing this research service, as well as hosting a large summer program in Education for graduate students and strong involvement in the university's short-lived Monteith College, the librarians had entrenched themselves far enough into the College of Education that they started to provide bibliographic instruction to courses in the 1960s.

In the 1970s, the Education Library's dedication to providing the best materials to its students, faculty, staff, and community was rewarded when it became one of 35 Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Reading Research Centers in the nation and the only one of its kind in the region. The purpose of the center was (and is) to make available quickly and conveniently the latest information and research in the field of reading ("ERIC/CRIER," February 1970). The librarians released a series of University press releases as well as how-to handouts for faculty and students. It was also during this time that the Education Library moved to the Kresge wing of the General Library when the Sciences Division moved into a new Science Library. Even with this large burden, librarians continued to provide bibliographic instruction to students and reference services, although due to dwindling enrollment in the College of Education, services and circulation statistics declined. By 1976, the discretionary book budget for education had been cut in half from \$48,000 to \$25,000, illustrating the economic decline of the nation and the temporary decline in enrollment.

By the 1980s, the Education Library was beset with budget cuts, layoffs, and unfilled vacancies for positions, all while trying to cope with the task of shifting the card catalog to the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2) and an online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Due to staff shortages, the Education Library was forced to close on weekends and curtail service to the community. Even so, the library was still able to pilot its Education Library Locator (ELL), created by Librarian Karen Bacsanyi, which allowed patrons to type in a call number and receive a graphical picture of where the book or material was located in the library. By 1984, the Education Library was "one of the largest education libraries in the United States" (Engle & Borgman, p. 21). The collection numbered 297,000 books; 18,146 periodicals; 343,623 microfiche; and 4,421 microfilm roles.

This collection was combined with textbooks, curriculum guides, children's and young adult literature, and a sample file of over 1,000 standardized

and experimental educational tests. The Children's and Young Adult Collections alone had 55,000 circulating volumes as well as the 1,200 volume Urban and Ethnic Collection, which represented specialized reading for inner-city children. In addition, the Education Library maintained a special collection of rare books donated by Ramsey in 1964, titled the Eloise Ramsey Collection of Literature for Children and Young People, which offered titles dating back to the Seventeenth century. However, despite the Education Library's size, its influence was declining. By the mid-1980s, a plan was in motion to merge all divisions in the general library into one.

Curtain Call: Merger into Purdy/Kresge Library

The proposal for a merger began with the renovation of the General Library, now renamed the Purdy/Kresge Library in which major service points for all divisions

were centered on the ground floor, periodicals were shelved together in the open stacks, and reference services were handled from a central desk by librarians who could answer questions in all subject areas, (Lothar Spang, "Proposal, Merging Collections," personal communication, n.d.). The response was positive, and prompted the staff and administration to consider further simplification of access to collections. Since faculty, staff, and students enjoyed the new system, the merger served as the death knell for the Education Library. Even so, these changes were not taken lightly. The College of Education conducted its own library survey, which also demonstrated the trend for a truly

general library (R. Craig Roney, p. 50). In 1985, Dean of the Library System Peter Spyers-Duran stated that, with the merger, "A student wouldn't have to run back and forth between service desks and various collections. The Library will be much easier to use" (Ware, p. 9). By the fall of 1986, the Education Library as a separate entity no longer existed.

Conclusion

Today, education materials are housed among the regular collection stacks. In recent years, librarians, students, and faculty have noted that the combination of the Education Library with that of the General Library has been a partial detriment since special



The reference desk at the Education Library, Wayne State University, Detroit Michigan, date unknown.

Courtesy of University Archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

materials such as curriculum guides, standardized tests, and textbooks are no longer collected but are still of use to those entering the teaching profession. Moreover, many students and faculty find the juvenile collection to be difficult to use due to the mixture of outdated and current books.

Even with the complaint of outdated books, what remains from the Education Library is its outstanding juvenile collection, which continues to be one of the largest examples of the history of children's literature in the nation. Books are regularly added to the collection in order to serve students of both the College of Education and the School of Library and Information Science. Four special Collections also remain: The Millicent A. Wills Collection of Urban-Ethnic Materials; the Mildred Jeffrey Collection of Peace and Conflict Resolution; the William Boyce Storytelling Collection; and, of course, the well-known Eloise Ramsey Collection of Literature for Children and Young People. The Ramsey Collection now contains 15,338 rare items and juvenile books that illustrate the historical and present trends in children's literature.

The Ramsey Collection is a closed collection, housed in a locked room on the fourth floor with access granted only through an appointment of the managing librarian. The books are preserved in acid-free envelopes and, in some cases, archival boxes. The collection maintains the organizational structure originally set-up by Ramsey, explicitly, that of subject classification rather than one by call number. Certain materials have been loaned out to reputable researchers, but this is done on a case-by-case basis. The most recent research to make heavy use of the Ramsey Collection is Donald Haase's three-volume *Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*. New materials are added to the Ramsey Collection only if they are appropriate to the history of children's literature or they are Newbery or Caldecott award winners.

Of the three remaining special collections, only the Millicent Wills Collection is non-circulating; although books are in the open stacks. This collection also

currently purchases materials relevant to multicultural diversity and urban life. The Boyce and Jeffrey's Collections are in open stacks and allowed to circulate. Books are not added to these collections.

Although the Education Library no longer remains as a separate entity, its history is still seen throughout Purdy/Kresge Library. Ramsey's collection and reputation is a heritage and trust for Wayne State University. What made Wayne State University's Education Library unique was neither its size and scope, nor its entrenchment within the College of Education, which began with Harriet Scott and the Detroit Normal School's small collection. Rather it was the grit and determination of three women, Dr. Gertha Williams, Mrs. Lois Place, and Miss Eloise Ramsey – a pioneer in her field – and one man, G. Flint Purdy, all of whom were committed to excellence, uniqueness, and a sense of community responsibility.

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